

Twin milestone for Portland cruise calls

Portland Port posted a double record-breaking year for cruise calls in 2025 after a short-notice visit on Friday 19th December.

It hosted the highest number of cruise calls in a single year with 64 ship visits and – with the visit by Saga’s Spirit of Discovery – welcomed vessels in every month from January to December for the first time.

The ship, which was also the first of 2025 to call in January, was diverted to Portland due to bad weather en route from Portsmouth to the Canary Islands on a Christmas cruise for nearly 1,000 guests.

Nearly 100,000 passengers arrived on vessels from 20 different lines during 2025, injecting circa £10m into the local economy.

Portland Port, which celebrates its 30th anniversary in 2026, continues to work hard to attract new and diverse ships.

Ian McQuade, Portland Port’s commercial general manager and chair of Cruise Britain, said: “It was fitting that the Spirit of Discovery was our first call of the year and then our final call of 2025. Her visit meant that we have welcomed cruise ships every month for the first time in a calendar year, which is a significant milestone for the port and the area. It capped another highly successful season when we welcomed a record 64 calls during the year.

This surpasses the 62 calls in 2021 and demonstrates the increasing popularity of the island and surrounding area for cruise lines and their passengers. The figure includes a growing and diverse number of luxury, specialist and expedition lines choosing Portland.

A great deal of work is dedicated behind the scenes to attracting and accommodating cruise ships, including those wishing to visit at short notice, which contributes circa £10m to the local economy and provides a valuable boost to local businesses in off-peak months as well as at the height of the season.

Feedback from cruise lines and passengers is consistently positive about the area, the warm welcome they receive and the attractions on offer. We are grateful to all those who have helped made 2025 a record year, including our welcome team, shuttle bus operators, residents and those in shop and businesses. Plans are already well advanced for 2026, and the years beyond, which will be announced in due course.”

The AIDAsol called eight times during the year. Luxury cruise line Silversea sent three ships to Portland on a total of six calls this year: the Silver Spirit, the Silver Dawn and the Silver Shadow.

Other ships to visit for the first time were Albatros Expeditions’ Ocean Albatros, AIDAluna, Le Boreal, Carnival Miracle, MS Europa 2, Ambition, Seven Seas Grandeur, Norwegian Jewel and Viking Vela.

SAGA, Princess, Ponant, Seabourn, Carnival, TUI, Hapag Lloyd, Fred Olsen, Ambassador, Phoenix and Holland America also featured Portland on their itineraries this year.

The £10m that cruise calls bring into the local economy annually is based on statistics from the Cruise Lines International Association (CLIA) trade body for spend per head of passenger. The figure includes expenditure in shops, bars, cafes, tourism attractions along with transport and tours. In addition, further expenditure comes from the crew that are given time off when in port along with berthing revenues through the port itself and businesses in the local supply chain.

Typically, about 50% of visiting cruise guests go on organised excursions, the majority of which stay in Dorset. Most of the remaining passengers explore the local area using the port's complimentary shuttle bus service, either choosing to stay on Portland or travel into Weymouth. Some also use taxis to travel to and from Portland to Weymouth and local destinations.

This year, the port hosted familiarisation trips for cruise line representatives from Fred Olsen, Silversea, Princess and Windstar cruise lines to promote the area and its attractions to attract more ships.

The year also saw the port organise and host another of its two-day familiarisation shore excursion events for cruise lines tour operators. The event started at Athelhampton House with Ian McQuade providing an overview of the cruise business and operation at Portland Port and was followed up with a tour of the magnificent house and gardens.

The Shire Hall Museum in Dorchester kindly hosted a networking event during the afternoon of the first day. Excelsior provided transportation and local attractions such as The Etches Collection, Swanage Railway, Corfe Castle and Langham Wine Estate hosted tours.

This event takes place every three years and helps highlight the fantastic places that Dorset and its surrounding area have to offer cruise passengers as well as building relationships between the tour operators and attractions.

The port's cruise team has also attended events worldwide to win more business.

They were among the delegates at Cruise Britain's annual 'Cruise into Winter' event, which was held at the historic Ironmongers' Hall in London in late November. It brought together representatives from ports, cruise service providers and a wide array of cruise lines.

As chair of Cruise Britain, Ian gave a keynote address with optimism about the sector's future and the importance of strategic alliances.

Portland Port opened a £26m deepwater berth in 2023, allowing it to welcome larger vessels, including ships up to 350m in length on opposite berths on the same day.